



## **Distributed Leadership: Reimagining Educator Roles**

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Our Children, Our Commonwealth.

This is a simple but profound belief. It impacts how each Kentucky educator perceives his or her individual responsibility within the school and also how each Kentucky school as a system uses the educator's passions and talents to promote equity, achievement and integrity.

Schools serve students best when leaders match the form and function of each educator's role to the needs of each student in the system. These responsive systems recognize that moving beyond the traditional hierarchical structure empowers schools to:

- make better decisions for students that are informed by many perspectives;
- cultivate teaching teams who seek to learn from each other's classrooms; and
- create a culture where leaders, teachers and students make their learning visible.

In this distributed leadership model, leaders have access to the diverse talents of the staff, and teachers are given the space and support to lead from and beyond their classrooms.

Additionally, distributed leadership can lead to increased teacher satisfaction and retention, higher student achievement and improvement in school climate.

Distributed leadership is:

- Reimagining [Teacher Leadership](#) roles in schools and districts
- Giving more teachers the opportunity to become meaningful leaders in their school and outside of their classroom by distributing leadership roles based on knowledge, skills and dispositions
- Providing supports to teachers during the leadership role to ensure meaningful and effective outcomes
- Honoring and investing in teachers as professionals and content specialists

Distributing the leadership roles within a school matches the needs of students to the strengths of educators and requires thinking past some of the traditional time and resource structures that confine educators' talents to their own classrooms. Here are some examples from across Kentucky:

### Glenn O. Swing Elementary School, Covington Independent

At Glenn O. Swing Elementary in Covington,, a teacher with exceptional relationship building and coaching skills has the role of supporting all the

students in the school in reflecting on and changing negative behaviors.<sup>1</sup> To best serve the students and other teachers, he has a flexible schedule that allows him to be available for just-in-time support and guidance.

### Boyd County schools

In Boyd County, teachers who have been studying mathematics and literacy instructional tools collaborate to design and implement professional learning across the district and coach other teachers.<sup>2</sup>

## Northern Kentucky

In Northern Kentucky, a group of teachers from across the region were concerned about the impact of high incidences of transience on student learning. They now meet to study the issue and make recommendations to schools and districts on adapting current practices to better serve students who move frequently between classrooms, schools and districts.<sup>3</sup>

## Boone County schools

This past summer, Teachers Transforming Teaching – the first cohort of Boone County science teacher leaders – met to begin the work of transforming science education across the district. In the past, teachers would have attended a professional development event where an outside expert told them how to best meet the needs of their students. Then those teacher would have taken this information back to the schools to be delivered in a department meeting.

These teacher leaders, however, no longer merely deliver information between the presenter and their colleagues and departments. Now, the teachers themselves are making decisions and recommendations about what work needs to be done, how that work should be accomplished and how they will know they are successful. They design instruction based on the needs of their students, in their context, and also coach others on implementing the units and gathering data on the effectiveness of their work. They are informed by the research and ideas of others outside of their groups and are taking the lead in developing a process and a product that makes sense for their students. These teachers are advocates for the science learning of not only the students in their classrooms, but also for every student in the district.

As teachers, they considered their strengths and learning needs. As teacher leaders, they are engaged in a deep, meaningful study of the science of teaching and learning. They ask and develop answers to questions about strategies to bring to life 3-D learning for all students, and about using the Understanding by Design framework for planning. They also think about their individual skills and dispositions as teacher leaders that enable them to lead from and beyond their classrooms. They reflect upon their roles and the [Kentucky Teacher Leadership Framework](#) to determine the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are strengths and to determine which they need to develop.

Although beneficial, embracing distributed leadership is not an easy shift. According to David Marquet, author of “Turning the Ship Around,” it requires reframing one’s thinking from the leader-follower model to the leader-leader model, wherein everyone is asked to think and make decisions, and the “leader’s job is to create an environment where thinking naturally occurs.” (Morgan, 2016) According to Marquet, three important principles should guide this new environment:

### Challenges of distributed leadership:

- Evolving the form and function of well-defined and communicated roles for teacher leaders
- Evolving the process for identifying individuals to serve in leadership roles beyond years of experience
- Evolving time and compensation models to provide the space for teachers to lead
- Evolving professional learning for teachers to cultivate skills and dispositions of effective leaders
- Evolving decision-making structures to include voices of those closest to the classroom

- Control: Distributed leadership ensures that each decision-maker has access to all the knowledge needed to make informed decisions.
- Competence: Distributed leadership means developing skills and confidence needed to be successful.
- Clarity: Distributed leadership works best when everyone clearly understands the common goals and moves together toward them (Morgan, 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Sean McComb, the 2014 National Teacher of the Year, reflects upon the impact of teachers as leaders this way:

“Leading is not complaining with a bigger microphone. We must leverage our voices and experience to be the dynamic, creative, solutions-focused agents that our students need us to be,” he said. “We must speak the truth of the realities in schools coupled with sensible paths forward that can influence others. ...

“At the Teaching and Learning Conference, I listened to Martin Luther King III recall the lifelong impression made on him by the inscription on a statue he saw as a child: ‘Be ashamed to die until you’ve won a victory for humanity.’ Many of us have won individual victories by changing lives in our classrooms. Perhaps our collective victory can be earning our profession the influence it deserves, [and] the identity our students need us to have.” (McComb, 2015)<sup>5</sup>

For more information on distributed leadership in Kentucky, visit the [Educator Career Pathways](#) page on the KDE website.

### Endnotes

1. See Domain 2, Components A and D, [Kentucky Framework for Teaching](#)
2. See Domain 4, Components D and E, [Kentucky Framework for Teaching](#)
3. See [Principal Performance Standard 1](#)
4. See [Principal Performance Standard 1](#)
5. See Domain 4, Components D and F, [Kentucky Framework for Teaching](#)

### Works Cited

McComb, Sean. “Why Now Is the Time to Go Into Teaching,” *The Huffington Post*. June 01, 2015. Retrieved from the World Wide Web ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sean-mccomb/why-now-is-the-time-to-go-into-teaching-\\_b\\_6972888.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sean-mccomb/why-now-is-the-time-to-go-into-teaching-_b_6972888.html)) on September 12, 2016.

Morgan, Jacob. “What you can learn about leadership from a nuclear submarine captain: How to create a cohesive environment with distributed decision-making in your organization.” June 28, 2016. Retrieved from the World Wide Web ([Http://www.inc.com/jacob-morgan/how-a-nuclear-submarine-captain-challenged-conventional-leadership-and-won.html](http://www.inc.com/jacob-morgan/how-a-nuclear-submarine-captain-challenged-conventional-leadership-and-won.html)) on September 12, 2016.

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